

Case study

Project: Rathgael Gymnastics Club
Type: Small facility changes that made a big difference to disabled people



Who are we?

Rathgael Gymnastics Club is a club based in Bangor in Northern Ireland. We established in 1974 and since then have moved to a purpose-built facility in the Saba Park in Rathgael to maximise the club's growth. We are proud to have approximately 1,200 members, at that venue as well as a school and satellite venue. We offer a wide range of disciplines and activities including Artistic, Recreational Gymnastics, TeamGym, Festivals, Tumbling, and FreeG. Within these disciplines we run 4 dedicated sessions for our disabled members, as well as sessions for adults and pre-school aged children.

What did we aim to do?

We wanted to make changes to our facility to make it more welcoming and accessible for all of our participants. We were not able to make any large scale or structural changes but instead knew we could make small changes that would have a significant impact on the accessibility of the facility.

What did we do?

We have re-designed our gym layout to improve the facility. The project was headed by our Technical & Performance Manager, Luke Carson, and all Heads of Departments were involved in amending and finalising the changes. It was the perfect opportunity to generate more space for wheelchair access and we now have a clear path from reception, into the gym and across the gym.

We have designed ramps for easy access onto our floor as it is raised off the ground (about 8 inches) and have included an emergency exit ramp as well. The ramp was designed and created by a parent of child who attends one of the classes. Prior to the completion of the custom fit ramps, we used two wooden boards that were able to act as a temporary ramp. The gym equipment has been re-set in such a way that a wheelchair user can access



the bars, beam, rings and tumble run from the floor area with ease as the matting under them is now flush with the floor area allowing easier access to everything. We wanted to ensure that our participants have access to all equipment we have available in the upstairs section of our gym which has a trampoline, foam pits and pommels. To allow all our participants access to this equipment, we bring our mini pommels and multiple mushrooms downstairs to use. We currently create a foam pit on the bottom level (when needed) by using our large spotting blocks to make a rectangle and then bring foam downstairs in the giant parachute to fill it. We also have two trampettes and a rebounder downstairs that can be used for seated bouncing in place of the trampoline if required as well.

What did we achieve?

The developments to our facility have made the gym more accessible, meaning it is a more suitable environment for people with visual impairments and wheelchair users. As a result of this we have been able to accommodate for a number of wheelchair users attending taster events. The emergency exit ramp rolls out to where our 'outdoor spending area' will be for any future guide dogs or therapy dogs in the gym. Feedback from our gymnasts and parents/guardians has been really positive since the changes have been made:





Before the changes were made



During the move

‘Gymnast: “It’s fun and exciting and I enjoy coming each week and learning new routines”

Gymnast: “it makes me super strong”

Parent: My daughter loves learning new skills and is so excited to show us what she has learned’

physical impairment which can be integrated into our para – gym programme.

Finally, we also intend on hosting a GymChallenge event for our physically disabled members. In preparation for this, we have been researching the GymFit programme as well as MAG and WAG PPP/Range and Conditioning routines for inspiration. Our aim is to host a pilot event at some point during 2018.



After the changes



What next?

To make our changing room even more accessible, we are seeking advice from Disability Sport Northern Ireland on a shower chair. Watch this space on a static or a wet chair.

We have just been established as a full Special Olympics Club. The new changes made to our facility mean that we will be able to prepare for the next competitive cycle in a suitable training environment. In order to attract more participants to take part in gymnastics we aim to host a taster event specifically for participants with a

What would we tell other clubs hoping to make their facility more accessible?

We would encourage other clubs to make any changes within their facility that will support disabled participants to continue taking part in gymnastics. You don’t always need to make big expensive changes, but sometimes just by speaking to your members about the challenges they can see within your facility and ways you could jointly get around them, you can help to include more people with a range of different needs. If you need any support developing your facility or increasing opportunities for disabled people please contact British Gymnastics.

Do you require support with disability gymnastics?

Contact us at: participation@british-gymnastics.org